

Message Text

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ACTION AID-59

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7649

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TAGS: ETRN, EAID, EAGR, ET, FT

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN FAMINE: CONGESTION OF RELIEF GRAIN AT
ASSAB AND DJIBOUTI

REFS: A. ADDIS 1631; B. GENEVA 0828; C. ADDIS 1392

SUMMARY: RECENT VISITS BY EMBOFFS TO PORTS OF ASSAB AND DJIBOUTI
REVEALED SERIOUS PILEUP OF ETHIOPIAN RELIEF GRAIN. HOWEVER, RAS
MENGESHA WILL PERSONALLY SUPERVISE PORT ACTIVITIES AT ASSAB AND
MASSAWA IN ATTEMPT TO PARTIALLY RESOLVE BOTTLENECK.

1. ASSAB. IN CONVERSATION WITH VISITING EMBOFF ON JANUARY 30,
ACTING PORT MANAGER OF ASSAB BISLAT SAID CURRENT CONGESTED SITUA-
TION RESULT OF 23,000 MT FERTILIZER, AND RELIEF GRAIN ARRIVING
DURING HEAVY EXPORT/IMPORT SEASON (NOVEMBER-APRIL). COMMERCIAL
TRUCKING CAPACITY NOT AVAILABLE SINCE FULLY UTILIZED AT PRESENT
IN TRANSPORTING GRAIN FROM HARVEST JUST ENDING IN HUMERA AREA OF
BEGEMDIR PROVINCE. BECAUSE OF TRUCKING PROBLEM, BISLAT SAID
GRAIN MUST SIT UPWARDS OF TWO WEEKS BEFORE BEING MOVED 480 KMS TO
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DROUGHT RELIEF CENTER OF DESSIE. ACCORDING TO BISLAT, IN ADDI-

TION TO GRAIN STORAGE, FUMIGATION OPERATIONS WHICH MUST BE DONE IN OPEN ALSO TAKE UP MUCH SPACE IN LIMITED PORT AREA. UNTIL EITHER FERTILIZER OR RELIEF GRAIN NOW IN PORT AREA MOVED, LITTLE IF ANY STORAGE SPACE AVAILABLE FOR ADDITIONAL RELIEF GRAIN. EMBOFF NOTED AT TIME OF VISIT THAT ALL COVERED WAREHOUSES AND OPEN PIER AREA LOADED WITH BAGS OF FERTILIZER AND RELIEF GRAIN AND OTHER EXPORTS AND IMPORTS. MOREOVER, PRC MERCHANT SHIP HUAI YIN WAS IN PROCESS OFFLOADING 4,000 MT OF PRC RED CROSS RELIEF WHEAT.

2. BISLAT DID NOT FORESEE EARLY EASING IN PORT CONGESTION. IN ADDITION, HE NOTED THAT FERTILIZER MUST BE DELIVERED TO FARMERS BEFORE "SHORT RAINS" BEGIN IN LATE FEBRUARY OR MARCH AND THAT COMMERCIAL TRUCKS WILL BE FULLY OCCUPIED IN INTERNAL GRAIN MOVEMENTS AND NORMAL EXPORTS UNTIL END OF APRIL. BISLAT CONCLUDED THAT IEG TO DATE HAD PROVIDED NO GOVERNMENT-OWNED TRANSPORTATION TO RELIEVE PRESSURE AND SAID HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND "WHY IEG DID NOT MAKE A HUNDRED TRUCKS AVAILABLE TO MOVE GRAIN".

3. DJIBOUTI. ON FEBRUARY 6, MR. MOHAMED RAZACK, GENERAL MANAGER OF MARITIME AND TRANSIT SERVICES S.C., A MAJOR DJIBOUTI FREIGHT FORWARDER, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER DURING COURSE FIELD TRIP TO THAT CITY THAT 10,000 TONS OF RELIEF GRAIN DESTINED FOR DROUGHT STRICKEN AREAS OF ETHIOPIA WERE BEING HELD IN PORT OF DJIBOUTI AT REQUEST OF ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT. THE GRAIN, WHICH IS PARTLY UNDER COVER AND PARTLY IN OPEN, CONSISTS OF 6,000 MT OF WHEAT FROM CHINA AND 4,000 MT OF MAIZE FROM KENYA. REPEATED EFFORTS BY FRENCH AUTHORITIES, FREIGHT FORWARDERS AND AN UNNAMED RED CROSS VICE PRESIDENT TO MOVE GRAIN OUT OF PORT AND INTO ETHIOPIA HAVE BEEN OF NO AVAIL. RAZACK ADDED THAT SITUATION WILL BE EXACERBATED WHEN ANOTHER 5,000 MT OF GRAIN FROM KENYA, ALSO DESTINED FOR ETHIOPIAN DROUGHT RELIEF, ARRIVES IN PORT IN NEAR FUTURE. ON SAME OCCASION, VISITING HEAD OF AN ETHIOPIAN PEST CONTROL COMPANY MENTIONED THAT CHINESE WHEAT, WHICH HAD ARRIVED VERMIN FREE, BECAME INFESTED WHEN IT WAS DUMPED NEXT TO THE ALREADY INFESTED KENYAN MAIZE. BOTH WHEAT AND MAIZE WERE SUBSEQUENTLY FUMIGATED.

4. ABOVE WAS LATER CONFIRMED BY JACQUES ALGRET, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE BANQUE DE L'INDOCHINE AND A DIRECTOR OF THE FRANCO-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ETHIOPIAN RAILWAYS, WHO ADDED THAT ADDITIONAL QUANTITIES OF GRAIN HAVE BEEN DEADLINED IN RAIL YARDS OF DIRE DAWA LOCATED MIDWAY BETWEEN DJIBOUTI AND ADDIS ABABA. ALGRET THOUGHT THAT THE GRAIN WAS ABOUT TO BE SENT ON TO ADDIS, BUT WAS UNABLE TO SAY WHEN.

5. MASSAWA. ACCORDING TO AMCONGEN ASMARA RELIEF GRAIN IS MOVING FAIRLY RAPIDLY FROM THE PORT OF MASSAWA TO DISTRIBUTION CENTERS IN ERITREA AND TIGRE.

6. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE CONGESTION PROBLEM AT ASSAB MAY BE REACHING CRISIS PROPORTIONS. LITTLE POSSIBILITY ASSAB WILL BE ABLE TO HANDLE MORE THAN SMALL QUANTITY ESTIMATED 30,000 MT OF RELIEF GRAIN EXPECTED TO ARRIVE ETHIOPIA BETWEEN NOW AND END OF MARCH. ASSAB'S CLOSENESS TO DROUGHT AREA MAKES IT IDEAL LANDING POINT FOR RELIEF SUPPLIES. CONGESTION AT DJIBOUTI LESS SERIOUS THAN THAT AT ASSAB BUT NEVERTHELESS INDICATIVE OF IEG DIFFICULTIES IN ORGANIZING DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF SUPPLIES. HOWEVER, CURRENT CONGESTION REQUIRES IMMEDIATE DIRECT IEG OR FOREIGN DONOR NATION TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION AND ORGANIZE MOVEMENT RELIEF SUPPLIES INLAND. SINCE FULLY OCCUPIED COMMERCIAL TRUCKING CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE TO IEG FOR RELIEF SHIPMENTS ONLY THROUGH COERCIVE ACTION OR AT EXORBITANT COST WITH CONCOMITANT ADVERSE IMPACT ON COST COMPETITIVENESS OF ETHIOPIAN EXPORTS, WE BELIEVE ESSENTIAL IEG SEEK ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION ELSEWHERE: I.E., ARMY, POLICE, MALARIA ERADICATION, ETC. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT IEG DID RELEASE 40 ARMY TRUCKS FOR THIS PURPOSE LAST WEEK.

7. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT PERIOD BETWEEN JANUARY AND LATE MARCH IS NORMALLY TIME OF PEAK PORT ACTIVITY. IN APRIL VOLUME OF EXPORTS USUALLY DECREASES SIGNIFICANTLY, RELEASING COMMERCIAL TRUCKING FOR USE ELSEWHERE. GIVEN CURRENT PORT CONGESTION, ADDITIONAL U.S. INPUTS SHOULD NOT ARRIVE BEFORE LATE APRIL AS MENTIONED IN ADDIS 1631, BY WHICH TIME SERIOUS CONGESTION SHOULD BE RELIEVED IF THE IEG ACTS AS NECESSARY TO PROVIDE REQ
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